

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 33

THE ECONOMIST  
4 APRIL 1981

## Spy mongers

### Moles mania

March was a bumper month for adherents of the bread-and-circuses theory of British government. Tales of economic woe have been crowded out of the headlines, first by news of a royal wedding, then by what a CIA spokesman once called "Britain's ability to produce spy stories with class" and finally, and most ludicrously, by rumours of a 13-year-old attempted coup.

The last can be dismissed most briskly. In May, 1968, the increasingly megalomaniac press baron, Mr Cecil King, whose paper the Daily Mirror had long supported Mr Harold Wilson as prime minister, decided that the time had come for him to go. Mr King had been roaming the lunch tables of Fleet Street and Westminster talking of a "businessman's government" and listing possible members. He eventually approached Lord Mountbatten to ask whether he might lead such a government in the event of Mr Wilson being toppled. Mountbatten, who saw him with the government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Solly (now Lord) Zuckerman, wisely sent him packing. A presumably embarrassed Mr King did not even mention the encounter in his published diaries. Shortly afterwards, his own board deposed him.

Such goings-on in Fleet Street would have been given short shrift by a Lloyd George or a Baldwin. But in the midst of the 1968 economic crisis, they fuelled the growing paranoia of Mr Wilson and his political secretary, Mrs Marcia Williams (now Lady Falkender). Ever fascinated by the internal workings of the security services, they pondered whether MI5, in particular, was infiltrated not so much by the KGB as by right-wing elements determined to discredit a Labour government, possibly in collusion with sympathisers in the City, the army and the press.

Anti-terrorist exercises at London Airport, reported comments from military dinners, putative private armies formed by ex-officers were all cited as evidence. Lady Falkender was even quoted last week as recalling:

Harold and I used to stand in the State Room at No 10 and work out where they would put the guns. We reckoned they would site them in the Horse Guards.

Understandably feeling he could not trust MI5 to investigate allegations against itself, Mr Wilson even turned to the CIA (then under Mr George Bush) to look into his own secret service. He was never averse to communicating his suspicions to others in government and outside. And Lady Falkender became a useful source on the subject to journalists—arguing that there were elements in government operating outside the realm of prime ministerial confidence and which ought to be subject to some external scrutiny.

One friend of Lady Falkender—and also a confidant of certain MI5 officials—was Mr Chapman Pincher, whose book\* last week sparked the latest version of the political game of hunt-the-spy. Mr Pincher denied that Lady Falkender was a source of information on his central thesis, that the head of MI5 from 1956-65, Sir Roger Hollis, was "prime suspect" as a KGB agent. His evidence, he said, came entirely from within the secret service.

The prime minister, Mrs Thatcher, vigorously rejected the accusation in a detailed commons statement on March 26th, which pointed out that Sir Roger (who died in 1973) had been twice investigated and twice cleared, the second time by the Trend report in 1974. Mr Pincher rather weakly replied that he had not himself accused Sir Roger, only reported what he had been told. His book, however, is filled with innuendo of Sir Roger's guilt. He, melodramatically, describes the Hollis affair as "a situation so menacing that the nation should be made fully aware of it".

Mrs Thatcher took the accusations seriously enough to delay her statement so she could study the affair in detail on her return from the European summit last week. She not only announced a revision of the formal vetting procedure by the security commission under Lord Diplock, but also instigated an inquiry into Mr Pincher's own sources. She is known to be concerned that the accusations against Sir Roger may in themselves be the result of KGB "disinformation".

Since it is virtually impossible at this distance in time to establish this sort of guilt or innocence except on the most circumstantial evidence (on which much of Mr Pincher's argument is based), rumour can run free.

Many of the charges against Sir Roger sound like the aggrieved complaints of subordinates in any tight-knit organisation against a boss they consider of an older and perhaps softer school. Whether they constitute evidence of treachery is extremely doubtful.

However, since Mrs Thatcher's inquiry into Mr Pincher's sources is unlikely to add to the sum of knowledge on the subject, she might have been better advised to leave a bruised and battered service to heal its own wounds rather than supply meat for yet another bout of speculations later in the day. This is the third such "leak" inquiry she has mounted in the past year. Its failure will doubtless provide yet another platform for Mr Pincher's allegations, and for another round of public voyeurism into the ever fascinating corridors of power. Sir Harold Wilson must be itching to get back into the action.

\* Their Trade is Treachery by Chapman Pincher, £7.95, Sidgwick and Jackson.